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SEVENTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 13-22 January 1998
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE SIXTH CONFERENCE

Report on the Toponymic Work in China

Paper submitted by China

* E/CONF.91/1

98-00283 D

TOPONYMIC WORK IN CHINA SINCE THE SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

January 1998

Toponymic work in China is valued and supported by the national and local governments at all levels. The following are some highlights of the progress that has been achieved in that work since the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1992:

1. Toponymic organs

In the course of streamlining the national administrative structure, the State Council decided to transfer the functions of the China Committee on Geographical Names to the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Agencies responsible for geographical names at the provincial, municipal and county levels have been incorporated into the government administrative structures at those levels. In order to strengthen scholarly research on toponymy, the Ministry of Civil Affairs has established an Institute for Chinese Toponymic Research which has already begun its work. Preparations are also under way for the establishment of a technical commission on the standardization of Chinese geographical names.

2. Publication of toponymic reference works and setting of standards

The China Committee on Geographical Names has prepared and published the Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo diminglu (A compilation of geographical names in the People's Republic of China) and the Waiguo diming yiming shouce (A handbook for the translation of foreign geographical names), each containing approximately 100,000 entries. The Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo diming dacidian (Encyclopedic dictionary of geographical names in the People's Republic of China), with 180,000 entries and some 20 million characters, will be published soon, while the large-format Zhongua Renmin Gongheguo biaozhun xingzheng guhua diming tuji (Atlas and gazetteer of standard geographical names in the People's Republic of China by administrative division) and the Zhongguo gujin diming dacidian (Encyclopedic dictionary of ancient and modern Chinese geographical names) are in preparation, with publication expected in the year 2000. In addition, authorities of provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions have been preparing and publishing books and reference works on local geographical names.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs and the National Bureau of Survey and Mapping have drawn up the Waiguo diming Hanzi yixie guize (Principles of Chinese-character transcription of foreign geographical names), containing principles for transliterating the sounds of place names in the English, French, Russian, Spanish and Arabic languages. The National Bureau of Survey and Mapping has also issued the Liyu diming Hanzi yiyin gueize (Principles of Chinese-character transliteration of the Li language) and the Liangshan Yiyu diming Hanzi yiyin guize (Principles of Chinese-character transcription of the Liangshan Yi language). In accordance with the mandate of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, we have completed the transcription of the Glossary of toponymic terminology for the Chinese version.

3. Training in toponomy

Since 1989, 10 training courses have been held at the national level for cadres whose work involves geographical names; a total of 1,100 persons have attended these courses. Starting with basic toponymic concepts, the training covers the standardization, uniform romanization, assignment, changing, administration, investigation and transcription of geographical names, as well as computerized files and databases of such names. Some local geographical name committees have also organized their own courses, which have provided good professional training for personnel involved in toponymic work. Basic toponymic training materials published to date include the Dimingxue gailun (Introduction to toponymy) and Shiyong dimingxue (Practical toponomy), edited by Wang Jitong, and Dimingxue jichu jiaocheng (A basic course in toponomy) by Professor Zhu Yaping.

4. Toponymic databases

In 1993, the National Bureau of Survey and Mapping formally completed a national topographic database and toponymic database based on a 1:1,000,000-scale topographic map; these databases contain nearly 80,000 geographical names of all types. A national toponymic database based on a 1:250,000-scale map is currently in preparation with completion expected in 1998.

5. Scholarly exchanges

Over the past five years, three scholarly conferences on toponomy have been convened at the national level. Topics discussed at these conferences have included the planning and administration of geographical names in coastal cities, the collation of computerized files of geographical names, and the

establishment of toponymic information systems. In March 1994, an international conference of scholars on geographical names in national-minority languages was held in the Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province, at which experts from the United Kingdom, Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong and Taiwan presented more than 50 papers.

6. Administration of geographical names

The rapid changing and expansion of China's cities are creating a need for more new names for streets and residential districts. In order to ensure the proper use of standardized geographical names, the installation and administration of place-name indicators of all kinds have been strengthened. National standards for all types of urban place-name signs are also being developed. Installation of name markers for small towns and villages along major highways throughout the country was begun in 1996, and the installation of name markers for more than 100,000 such small towns and villages is expected to be completed by the end of 1998.

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ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
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NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION: OFFICE TREATMENT OF NAMES

Report on the Standardization of Geographical Names in China

Paper submitted by China**

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98-00408 D

THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN CHINA

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Because of China's long history and numerous ethnic groups, the assignment, writing and romanization of its geographical names, as well as the Han-character transcription of Chinese and foreign geographical names, are very complex. As a result, the work of standardizing geographical names in China is relatively difficult. In the light of the substantive circumstances, the general criteria for standardizing a given geographical name are as follows: it should be written according to the norms of correct spelling and pronunciation (whether in Han characters, the characters of minority language scripts, the Roman alphabet, or the Hanyu Pinyin phonetic alphabet (Pinyin)); it should carry no unsound connotations; its assignment or change should follow the approval process prescribed by law; (if translated,) its translation should adhere to the criteria of the national standardization scheme; and it should be transcribed on the basis of standard pronunciation (or according to generally accepted pronunciation if a standard pronunciation does not exist).

I. FORMULATION OF LEGAL NORMS AND STANDARDS FOR THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Legal regulations and standards for geographical names are the foundation and guarantee for achieving the standardization of geographical names. Not only should the norms and standards for assigning, changing and writing geographical names be uniform, but there should also be definite norms and standards for transcribing domestic and foreign names in different languages, as well as for assigning, changing and transcribing substantive geographical names in international territories such as the oceans, Antarctica and so on. With regard to the administration of geographical names in China, the Chinese authorities have issued the Diming guanli tiaoli (Administrative Regulations for Geographical Names) and Diming guanli tiaoli shishi xize (Guidelines for Implementing Administrative Regulations for Geographical Names). In the area of technical norms, they have drawn up the Zhongguo diming Hanyu pinyin zimu pinxie guize (Hanyu bufen) (Principles of Pinyin Romanization of Chinese Geographical Names (Han-language Section)), Zhongguo diming xinxi xitong jishu guifan (shixing) (Technical Norms for Chinese Toponymic Information Systems (Trial Implementation)), Waiguo diming Hanzi yixie tongze (shixing) (General Principles for Han-character Transcription of Foreign Geographical Names (Trial Implementation) and Ying/fa/de/o/xi(banya)/a(labo) liuzhong yiming guize (Principles of Transliterating English, French, German, Spanish and Arabic

Names), along with phonetic transcription tables for 50 of the world's languages; a number of other documentary guidelines have been prepared as well. The establishment of legal norms for Chinese geographical names has thus been put on a relatively sound basis; henceforth, attention will turn to the drafting of a comprehensive system of technical standards for toponymic terminology, transcription, usage, assignment and change, transliteration, computerization, information systems, signage, codes and reference works. Each of these standards can be subdivided into several subsidiary standards.

II. CRITERIA FOR ASSIGNING AND CHANGING GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

The assignment and changing of geographical names are at the crux of toponymic standardization. To qualify as a standardized, Government-sanctioned geographical term, a toponym must meet the criteria of written simplicity, name stability, and adherence to the norms of general usage, and must also undergo a specific approval process.

1. Basic principles for assigning geographical names

According to the provisions of the Guidelines for Implementing Administrative Regulations for Geographical Names, the assignment of toponyms in China must:

(a) Enhance national unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity;

(b) Reflect local human or natural geographical features;

(c) Employ standard Han or minority-language characters;

(d) Avoid the use of foreign persons' or place names;

(e) Avoid duplicating the names of administrative divisions at the county level and above for places which do not contain the seats of the local People's Governments.

- The names of neighbourhood committee offices in townships and small towns within the same county, city or district, the names of natural villages within the same township, and the names of streets, lanes and residential districts within the same town should not be duplicated;

- The substantive names of famous Chinese gecgraphical features should not be duplicated;

- The names of provinces, autonomous regions and cities directly

administered by the central authority, as well as those of the more important local features of the natural geography, should not be duplicated.

- The use of homophonous characters should also be avoided for toponyms covered under the foregoing framework.

(f) The substantive names of famous geographical features such as mountain ranges, rivers etc. should not be used as the proper names of administrative divisions, nor should the names of natural geographical entities whose scope exceeds that of the administrative division concerned.

(g) The name of a county, city or municipally-administered district cannot duplicate that of a village or town that is not the seat of that administrative division's People's Government.

(h) The offices of local committees for townships, small towns and neighbourhoods should generally be named after the townships or small towns in which the local People's Government has its seat, or the streets in which those offices are located.

(i) Newly-built or relocated urban streets and residential districts should be named according to the appropriate administrative level, construction order and name standardization criteria.

2. Basic principles for changing geographical names

(a) Changing toponyms that violate general and specific national policies:

All toponyms that impair Chinese territorial sovereignty and national dignity, that are ethnically discriminatory in nature, that hinder national unity, that are extremely vulgar, that insult the working people or otherwise violate general and specific national policies should be changed.

(b) Within a given area or region, names in the same geographical category should not be duplicated. In principle, all toponyms that violate the name-assignment provisions of item 1 (e) above should be changed. However, such changes should proceed in accordance with the development needs of cities and towns, and should be implemented gradually.

(c) Names of all offices of local Government at the township or small-

town level should be made uniform with those of the seats of those local Governments.

(d) All non-standard, incorrect, traditional complex-form or obscure characters used in geographical names should be changed to standard and more commonly-used characters. Moreover, all characters inappropriate for use in geographical names, or whose pronunciations too closely resemble those of characters with inappropriate connotations, should also be revised.

III. STANDARDIZATION OF GENERAL GEOGRAPHICAL TERMINOLOGY

General geographical terminology comprises the terms used in geographical names to differentiate the various categories to which they belong, and are an essential part of modern standard toponymy. Such terms include the category names for administrative divisions (province, county, city, township etc.) and for substantive features of natural geography (mountain, river, lake, sea and so on). In the Han language such terminology is very complicated, particularly with regard to terms for substantive features of natural geography and for some features of human geography as well. Local variants of general terms are especially numerous, and a single general term can also have several different meanings. This impairs the ability of such terms to convey specific meanings, and the confusion is compounded when the terms are written in roman characters. The standardization and rationalization of general geographical terms are therefore an important part of the work of standardizing geographical names.

IV. ENSURING UNIFORMITY IN WRITING AND SPELLING GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

The success of the standardization of geographical names is manifested in the way such names are written, pronounced and romanized. In other words, the characters used in geographical names must adhere to national norms of character usage, and must not include invented characters, traditional complex-form characters for which simplifications already exist, and variant character-forms which have been officially discarded. The forms of characters used in geographical names must conform to the standards jointly issued in 1965 by the Ministry of Culture and the Committee on Chinese Language Reform in the Yinshua tongyong Hanzi zixingbiao (Table of Han Character Forms for General Use in Printed Materials). Toponyms in minority languages must use the characters and pronunciations determined by the norms for the scripts of those languages. Readings of toponyms having standard pronunciations will follow those standards, while toponyms lacking standard pronunciations will be read according to common usage in the local language. In cases where neither a written version in the local language's script nor an established Han-character version exist, the toponym can be standardized in accordance with the norms for translating names into Han characters. When such toponyms are to be written in the scripts of

other minority languages, their written forms and pronunciations should also be standardized according to the norms for those languages.

The basis for the uniform romanization of Chinese geographical names is the Hanyu pinyin fang'an (Chinese Phonetic Plan). Geographical names in the Han language, and those in minority languages that are written in Han characters, are romanized according to the Zhongguo diming Hanyu pinyin zimu pinxie guize (Hanyu diming bufen) (Principles of Pinyin romanization of Chinese toponyms (Han-language toponym section)). Toponyms in Mongolian, Uygur, Tibetan and other minority languages are romanized according to the Shaoshu minzuyu diming Hanyu pinyin zimu yinyi zhuanxiefa (Methods for Converting Minority-language Geographical Names to Pinyin Romanization). In principle, all Chinese geographical names and general terms appearing on maps published in foreign languages are to be written in Pinyin romanization. However, as a convenience for readers, the general terms for administrative divisions and some natural geographical features may be freely translated, with a table of commonly-used terms appended to the map they appear on. A flexible format involving free translations combined with freely-translated phonetic renderings may be used for Chinese geographical names and general terms appearing in books, newspapers and written documents. The spelling of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan geographical names will continue to follow established usage in those locations.